

Magic and Religion in Rational, Empirical, and Revelational Theologies

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Summary:

- Rational Theologies see magic as a form of experience and so dismiss it as the far lesser real. Man is God.
- Empirical Theologies usually combine magic with religion and construct theories whereby powers can be tapped by humans who have access to the secret science. Men can become gods.
- Revelational Theologies usually see magic as anti-divine. Man is not God neither can he be God.

Magic in Rational Theology

Arguments based on Gaudapada's Karika from Epistemics of Divine Reality (2009)

"...reason lacks any synthetic (empirically demonstrable) way by which it can be proven that something can be created by someone out of nothing. The only cases where such creation out of thin air is seen are in magic or the conjurer's trick. But the result of such creation is illusory and unreal and proof of the doctrine of non-dualism which states that phenomenon is illusory or unreal." (pp.90-91)

"The phenomenal world is called real only in the same way that an elephant conjured up by magic is called real by depending on perception and adequate behaviour. However, the magician's elephant does not exist, so neither does the phenomenal world exist." (pp.93-94)

The Hypothesis of Maya

"Even as objects appear to be real by magic, so do objects appear to be real through *Maya* (IV. 58, 59).

In the same manner that magic is not an object that exists; *Maya* also is not an object that exists (IV. 58, 59).

As a creature conjured up by magic (*Yatha mayamayo jeevo*) undergoes birth and death, so also do all creatures appear and disappear (IV. 69).” (p.95)

Magic in Empirical Theology

Primal Theology, Epistemics (2009), pp.123-129

‘Magic,’ in primal religion, may be defined as ‘any art that invokes supernatural powers’ or the ‘art of influencing events supernaturally.’¹ At the core of most primal religions is the belief that man can force nature to conform to his will through use of spells and ceremonies.² Magic and religion are not always separable.³ This, however, is not characteristic of only primal religions. Almost every religion has some sort of ‘science’ which it believes can influence nature in favor of man. Ranging from chanting to performing of certain ceremonies, this magical outlook has great influence on one’s religion.

Though looking quite unscientific to the modern scientific mind, the experience with magic and supernatural powers is something quite ubiquitous. The attempt to explain away these events as unscientific does not rule out the factuality of the experience itself. In the end, it is one’s own personal subjective experience that highly matters in religious matters, and it is indubitably established that the belief in magic is not without empirical supplement of results. A specialist in the study of the occult, Dr. Kurt E. Koch, in his book *Between Christ and Satan*, gives record of about 78 cases in which magic was involved.⁴ Likewise, W. Lyod Warner, in his *A Black Civilization: A Study of an Australian Tribe*, mentions several cases of magic and medicine among the Murngin that could not be scientifically explained.⁵ Even if such instances are rejected as naïve interpretations of scientifically explainable events, the fact of the universality of magic still is undeniable. According to R. R. Marett in England, H. Hubert and Marcel Mauss in France, mana was the basis of magical belief and practice.⁶ In the Murngin tribe, for instance, the medicine man is supposed to derive his mana from the clan, and uses this power as sorcery and magic to destroy some enemy power.⁷

¹ Maurice Waite (ed.), *The Little Oxford Dictionary*, rev. 7th edn. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 381

² C. A. B. Turkey, *Religion, Primal Religions*, p. 114

³ W. Lyod Warner, *A Black Civilization: A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, rev. edn. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), p. 9

⁴ Kurt E. Koch, *Masih aur Shaitan ke Beech*, Hindi translation of *Between Christ and Satan* (Faridabad: Sabina Printing Press, 1999), pp. 60-98

⁵ W. Lyod Warner, *A Black Civilization: A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, pp.183-212

⁶ “Mana,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 14 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1968), p. 746

⁷ W. Lyod Warner, *A Black Civilization: A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, p. 233

The concept of 'mana' seems to be deeply connected with the primal view of reality and even divine reality. The word 'mana' is a Melanesian word meaning 'power,' 'potence' or the like.⁸ Common among the primal religions is the belief that men, spirits, and gods possess some mysterious power that enables them to accomplish unusual things. This mana is believed to be transferable to animals and objects. The *Oreada* of the American Indian, the *Kami* of the Japanese,⁹ the *Chi* of the Chinese, and the *Prana* of the Hindus¹⁰ are other words similar to mana. The islanders of Pacific Islands considered mana as an impersonal, supernatural force that flowed through objects, persons, and places. They believed that certain animals, persons, and religious objects had such high levels of mana that touching them would only incur injury; therefore, they declared all such mana-filled beings and objects as *taboo* (forbidden to touch).¹¹ The belief in mana is also the basis of *fetishism*, the veneration and use of objects that are believed to contain mana.¹² Manaism, then, is the belief that things are pervaded by or possess some powers that are relatively negative or positive and could either cause good or evil to others. Thus, plurality and immanence are ready characteristics of mana, which is believed to be individually found in different objects in different proportions.

There are various ways in which people have tried to explain this belief in mana. Sociologically, a description in terms of mana often appears to be a symbolic way of accounting for the authority and status of certain people in society.¹³ Manaism, then, may have been a mythical (intended or inferred) construct that ensured and explained authoritative positions and relations within the tribe. Such a theory, however, does not explain why different tribes disconnected from each other are parallel in their theories of mana. Many possibilities exist: manaism may have originated among humans when they were only a single, homogenous unit or it may have spread from one tribe to another or it parallelly arose in the tribal experiences and was modified by inter-tribal connections through war, trade, marriages, etc. However, since a historical appraisal of the problem is not without difficulties, an existential analysis may be somewhat proper in this direction.

Based on Rudolf Otto's (1869-1937), *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), manaism may be seen as a belief originating from a sense of awe and dread about a mysterious something 'other' that lurks behind the face of nature. At the core of the belief in mana, then, might have been the view that all being is pervaded by mysterious

⁸ C. A. B. Tirkey, *Religion, Primal Religions*, p. 116

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 117

¹⁰ "Chi," *Alternative Healing Dictionary* (<http://www.reiki.nu/treatment/healing/dictionary/dictionary.html>)

¹¹ "Mythology," *The World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 13, p. 825

¹² C. A. B. Tirkey, *Religion, Primal Religions*, pp. 127, 128

¹³ "Mana," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 14, p. 746

powers. Eventually, these 'mysterious' powers were assumed to aid or curtail the prospects of man.

The origins of the belief in mana may be traced to the human psychology of the religious experience. According to Rudolf Otto, humans have a particular sense of awe or dread about a mysterious something, which he calls the *numinous*.¹⁴ Otto traces the origin of primitive religions to this sense of a *mysterium tremendum*, the numinous dread or 'the dread inspired by the numinous',¹⁵ which in primitive people appears as daemonic dread.¹⁶ According to Otto, this daemonic dread is nothing but a misapprehension of the numinous.¹⁷ Out of such dread has come the belief in demons and deities. In Otto's own words:

...Whatever has loomed upon the world of his [man's] ordinary concerns as something terrifying and baffling to the intellect; whatever among natural occurrences or events in the human, animal, or vegetable kingdoms has set him astare in wonder and astonishment – such things have ever aroused in man, and become endued with, the 'daemonic dread' and numinous feeling, so as to become 'portents', 'prodigies', and 'marvels'. Thus and only thus is it that 'the miraculous' rose.¹⁸

The eight phenomena of primitive religion, viz., 'magic, worship of the dead, ideas regarding souls and spirits, belief that natural objects have powers that can be manipulated by spells etc, belief that natural objects like mountains and the sun and the moon are actually alive, fairy stories (and myths)',¹⁹ are, accordingly, the earliest expressions of the human predisposition for religious experience. Thus, all such mystical assumptions developed in the early evolutionary stage of humans.

However, a universal belief in mana, as seen in many cultures, cannot be fully accounted by a theory that sees all such beliefs as primitive expressions of religious inclination or awe. Though it is not improbable that induction based on the sense of the numinous, parallelly led to manaim in the different cultures, the conclusion is not feasible since the reason considered supportive, viz. the mere sense of awe, does not *necessarily* lead to such a complicated theory of manaim as found in primitive cultures. Secondly, it is even debatable whether the history of primal religion has been of evolution or devolution: some anthropologists have suggested that tribes are not animistic because they have continued unchanged

¹⁴ C. A. B. Tirkey, *Religion, Primal Religions*, p. 117

¹⁵ "Otto on the Numinous," (<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/gothic/numinous.html>)

¹⁶ "Otto's 'Idea of the Holy': Summary," (<http://www.bytrent.demon.co.uk/otto1.html>)

¹⁷ "Otto on the Numinous," (<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/gothic/numinous.html>)

¹⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (tr. John W. Harvey; New York: Galaxy Book, 1958), p. 64

¹⁹ "Otto's 'Idea of the Holy': Summary," (<http://www.bytrent.demon.co.uk/otto1.html>)

since the dawn of history; rather, evidence indicates their degeneration from a monotheistic perspective.²⁰ Tribal studies bear witness to such a theory.²¹ Some scholars have seen in mana and allied notions not a single evolutionary stage or prior component in religious thought but a set of complex, vaguely defined metaphysical concepts expressing the view that human efficacy is not explicable in physical terms alone.²² Accordingly, it may be assumed that the dreadful and mysterious sense of the numinous, together with some pre-understanding of the supernatural through experience in the occult (magic, witchcraft, magical ritualism, etc.) or religion, and the necessity of a cultic establishment of authority may have contributed to the development of manaism. Thus, subjective (sense of the numinous) and objective (occultic or religious) experience can be accounted as sources of manaism in primitive cultures.

Manaism, evidently, then is an empirical construct. The rational epistemics of ultimate reality would have vouched for a transcendent, prime mover, or power beyond the universe. However, in a setting where the rational concept is either rejected or unthought of, reliance on the empirical epistemic method, naturally, would yield a belief in some sort of power or powers that pervaded (was immanent to) all being and thus accounted for the evil or good of things. Consequently, the empirical characteristics of plurality (differences of mana), immanence (indwelling), and mutability (transferability) are observable in manaism.

Magic in Revelational Theology

"But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods." (Exo 7:11-12)

Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not. So there were lice on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said. (Exo 8:18-19)

"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or

²⁰ Robert Brow, "Origins of Religion," *The World's Religions* (Oxford: Lion Publishing plc, 1992), p. 31

²¹ Cf. T. Hembrun, *The Santals: Anthropological-Theological Reflections on Santali & Biblical Creation Traditions* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1996), pp. 34-36; and T. Nongsiej, *Khasi Cultural Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), pp. 21-28

²² "Mana," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 14, p. 746

a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you." (Deut. 18:10-12)

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies..." (Gal 5:19-20)

"But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand." (Act 13:8-11)